The Next 50 Years for Malaysia: An Inquiry Using Alternative Futures Methods

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Abstract

Knowing what Malaysians really want in the next fifty years requires futures thinking. While the 12th General Elections showed the people's desires the Futurist will see the following as drivers of change in the future: the National Coalition (Barisan Nasional) model of Governance is no longer tenable; the Monarchy system is reasserting itself; the Alternative Media is catching on; wealth distribution is to be based on 'all for one and one for all' principle and the identity of the state is global in outlook. We can also anticipate the following trends: the rising force of Islam; the coalition of 'foreign workers' as the new Opposition in Government; China to have special relationship with Malaysia and the new apex of power between Brunei, Singapore and Bangkok will impact on Malaysia's economic future. Several alternative futures scenarios are suggested.

Keywords: alternative futures, futures thinking, Malaysia, needs, expectations

1. Introduction

This paper presents several ideas about the future of Malaysia in the next fifty years. It takes the position of looking at the future of the country from the perspective of futures thinking. In doing so it utilizes several of the methods that have become the mainstay of futures thinking including emerging issues analysis, causal-layered analysis and back-casting. The main objective of the paper is to contextualize the recently-concluded 12th General Elections and pose questions as to the strategic directions the country will be moving towards in the year 2057 which is the centennial year of Malaysia's independence. The principal focus is therefore to evaluate how far Malaysians are able to gauge what they really want for themselves and the country for the future.

The paper is divided into several sections. Following the Introduction in section one, section two examines the past attempts at narrating the future of Malaysia. This is followed in section three with an evaluation of the methods used and some of the results of the various exercises mentioned. Section four considers the range of knowing about the future that has been made possible through the past experiences cited and the general determination of the needs of Malaysians in the past as shown in these experiences. A model of analysis is presented for discussion. Sections four and five discuss aspects of the future in some detail using the above model including the main drivers of change, emerging issues and trends and creating alternative futures scenarios for the year 2057. The conclusion will integrate the various sections together and end with some 'news headlines' on the outlook for Malaysia fifty years hence as seen from the perspectives of Malaysians.

2. Past Experiences in Creating Alternative Futures

I propose to focus on four developments that have taken place in Malaysia concerning attempts at looking to alternative futures for the country. These occurred from 1975 – 2008. I was only involved personally in the last two of them.

2.1. 1975 Experience looking at Malaysia in 2001

In 1975 the Syed Kechik Foundation organized a series of futures workshops to focus on the subject of Malaysia in the Year 2001. According to the Editor's Preface (Ross-Larson, 1978, pp.vii-x), six months prior to the International Conference held in Kuala Lumpur, weekend-long workshops were conducted throughout the country in Penang, Malacca, Kuala Trengganu, Kota Kinabalu, Kuching and Kuala Lumpur. Each of these workshops gathered around 40 Malaysians who deliberated on the future of the country for their children and grandchildren. The proceedings of these workshops were made available in the International Conference that followed that saw about 100 participants from Malaysia and abroad notable among them were Robert Jung, James Dator, Arthur C. Clarke, Herman Kahn and R. Buckminster Fuller. Several of the foreign attendees gave talks that were designed to "incite and unleash the futuristic thinking of Malaysian participants. Of these talks some were local in orientation, most were global and one was universal. There were no eco-freaks, no doomsayers, no domino theorists to puncture the enthusiasm of Malaysians" (Ross-Larson, 1978, p.viii). Ross-Larson concluded that the conference did not get that far because of the difficulties of grappling with the complex issues of the future and due mainly to their habit of being accustomed to considering only the past, present and the near future but less of the future beyond the immediate.

What came out very clearly from this exercise was that Malaysians were quick to say what was not right with the system instead of what could be done right for the future. Nevertheless a cross-section of their views can be summarized as follows:

Values – emphasis was placed on the economy. Everybody wanted to make sure that their share of the economy would always be there even in 2001. They could therefore accept the New Economic Policy as a correct move by the Government. On this basis

would rest the sum of their values in terms of their attitudes towards one another and towards the other races in the multiracial mix in the country.

Social Disorder – the issue of utmost concern to most of the participants was when the next 'May 13' would occur. This pointed to the ever-worrying sign that the issue of communalism would still remain a sensitive one and one that could trigger further social tensions in the future. Part of the problem according to the book was that this issue had been adequately addressed politically and economically. In the social dimension however much remained to be done. The participants felt that education could hold the key to get the country out of the social crisis (Ross-Larson, 1978, p.20).

Political – the important issue of the day concerned the character of the government and whether it would be better for it to be authoritarian or democratic. A balance needed to be achieved between Malay political power and Chinese economic power. In the event that Malay economic power has risen due to the political measures implemented then Chinese political power must be seen to have risen as well.

Economics – there was a consensus that the balance between meeting the expectation of the people and the realization of these expectations must be properly calibrated by the Government. Above all the quality against quantity issue needed to be addressed altogether.

In general the discussions indicated that to resolve some of the problems that could be expected in 2001, Malaysians would be required to enhance the economy, improve the quality of education and brace themselves to confront change.

2.2. 1994 Experience looking at future visions for Southeast Asia: Some early warning signals

The conference was organized by the Institute for Policy Research, based in Kuala Lumpur together with the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF) and was held in Penang to introduce futures studies to Malaysians and to imagine alternative futures for Southeast Asia in particular Malaysia. According to the Conference Report (Inayatullah, 1995) the conference had several purposes: to generate alternative visions of the future, investigate issues that might dramatically change the socio, economic and cultural environment and develop consensus on preferred visions for the future.

The conference was addressed by Zia Sardar, Sohail Inayatullah and Tony Stevenson, all futurists in their own right. Participants discussed a wide range of issues that included: questioning of development, rise of consumerism, disintegration of traditional social structure, polarization within society because of religious fundamentalism, Malaysia playing a dominant role in regional and international affairs, a shortage of skilled labor, leisure and too much free time, a greater flow of information, illegal immigrants, increasing cults, increased child abuse and domestic violence as family begins to break down, pornography, new diseases, environmental problems, urban problems, more critical attitudes towards royalty, emergence of a generation of Malay entrepreneurs and new converts to Islam.

It was reported that in their visioning process the participants showed optimism for the future. They saw Malaysia in 2020, integrating very well culturally, economically and politically in the region.

At the end of the workshops three different scenarios were created: firstly, the status-quo scenario which meant that there would be more of the same; secondly, the collapse scenario derived from the first that would lead to disaster and thirdly, the transformational scenario which assumed that there would be fundamental societal, technological and spiritual changes to come.

Generally participants expressed a wish for Malaysia to go for consumer-led economic development and that technology, not politics would guide regional cooperation. .Finally Malaysia would become a centre of Islamic learning.

2.3. 2005 Experience looking at constructing future higher education scenarios

The exercise was started by the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang, as part of its continuing efforts at charting out innovative work on the future of higher education for the country. Within USM the project began with a workshop held in June 2005 to map the future of higher education, anticipate events and trends, explore the impact of the trends and events, deepen the understanding of the future of higher education in the country and create scenarios of the future for the Universiti Sains and visioning that future (Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2007, p.11). This was followed by a series of seminars and other workshops conducted throughout the year culminating in a Workshop in December 2005 on "Creating the Futures of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM): Back-casting and Visioning of the Scenarios". Five different scenarios for higher education in 2025 were able to be drawn up. They represented the alternative futures images for universities in the following order:
The 'A-la-Carte' University
The Invisible University
The Corporate University
The State University
The University in a Garden

Consequent to the above efforts the University also carried out surveys to gauge the views of the principal stakeholders of the university thus facilitating further 'buying-in' of the different scenarios among the campus community. This was followed by the setting up of a website aimed at reaching out to a wider audience that consequently enabled feedback to be obtained from all levels of the campus community (Universiti Saius Malaysia, 2007, p.12).

What became clear at the end of the process of workshops and visioning of the University of the future, was the realization that whatever the scenarios that have been identified the future realization of any one of them would have to depend on the directions and choices that would have to be made by the Ministry of Higher Education and other relevant institutions in the country. In such a situation when there are aspects of the future course of action that are beyond the control of the university itself as it was in the case cited, one would have then to be forced to ask the question whether the exercise had been a useful one to have been undertaken in the first place? So much should then be said about the leadership of the exercise as well, in order for the question to be answered. In this very exercise it was the leadership of the university that felt convinced that there would be something in the futures methodology that could assist University planners in their strategic thinking and planning that the normal

processes of strategic planning would not have adequately addressed. In the exercise discussed above the action of going ahead with the process and thinking about the future of universities in general and more specifically for the Universiti Sains itself was sufficient to reaffirm whatever values and enablers would be available out there to strengthen the hold of the University leadership on what needed to be done to position the Universiti Sains ahead of the pack in the country and beyond. The attempt to discuss and isolate all the drivers of change in the Future had enabled the university community to realize the gaps in their knowledge on how the universities of the future should operate. In looking at the future the exercise had really presented to the university community all the possibilities that would matter through the intervention of a methodology that has been tried and tested.

2.4. 2008 Experience looking at future of science and technology

A similar experience occurred at the Workshop that was conducted by the Institute for the Future (IFTF) based in Palo Alto, California, to map the contents and dynamics of global science and technology innovation, and that of Malaysia as a future hub of scientific development and innovation in the region. This exercise represented a new platform by which policy-makers and the science and technology community, as well as the general public can better understand the global innovation trends and access an open-source database of collective intelligence about science and technology (Institute for the Fature, 2007, p. 1).

The IFTF efforts came after a series of work concerning groupware systems, R&D, education, scientific publishing and communication among scientific and research clusters. The Malaysian series were organized in Penang and Shah Alam and centered on several topics ranging from the: future of science to ideas, innovations and challenges, identification of trends, future of scientific practice and the new geography of science. The sessions concluded with some scenarios for the future of science in Malaysia in the year 2020.

In the process some common choices of important trends were identified: better understanding of Nature, Cancer cure, nanotechnology, artificial neuron and natural resources management. The two sessions respectively and interestingly enough displayed almost similar results: issues of aging, sustainability, values and ethics. In a sense the sessions guided participants towards a discussion of how scientific knowledge could be organized and sustained for the common good of society. It has relevance for Malaysia that itself had identified as one of its challenges in realizing its Vision 2020 (Wawasan, 2020), the establishment of a society that is based on science and technology.

3. Evaluation of Methods Used and Implications for Results and Outputs

Depending on the methods used, the outputs and results from the experiences discussed above showed a lot of differences between one and the other. This will have implications for the success of the various exercises in mapping out what Malaysians really want for the future.

In exercise 2.1, it stopped short of coming up with the wish-list of Malaysians for the future. This could be attributed to the fact that participants were dwelling too much on the aspects of the present. They were merely cataloguing the so-called 'wrongs' of the present and not moving on to consider what could be done 'right' for the future (Ross-Larson, 1978, p.vii). Part of this could be expected since very little time was given to the presentation of processes or methods at futures thinking. Instead participants were given the time to brainstorm on the future and then were exposed to different lectures by invited speakers who deliberated on certain aspects of the future and not all the presentations were specifically on Malaysia.

A similar result could be reported for exercise 2.2. Here it was an improvement however, in that participants were initially treated to a series of lectures before breaking up into smaller groups for various workshop sessions. The three presenters were all involved in giving their inputs both theoretically and methodologically. In particular Sohail Inayatullah, the third presenter, introduced a methodology that assisted the process of scenario-building. This facilitated some futures thinking among the participants. These were discussed under four main headings as follows: the revolt against accepted values, containing social disorder, controlling political turmoil and the satisfaction of individual needs.

The third exercise was very specific as far as methodology and process went. Sohail Inayatullah was the principal facilitator and he introduced a process and a method that guided the discussion and moved the deliberations accordingly forward. Based on the MADCT process (mapping, anticipating, deepening, creating and transforming) Inayatullah was able to lead the participants to the desired goal of creating alternative futures for the university for the coming 20 years, by the year 2025. The first two exercises had the time frame of 25 years and 30 years respectively. A longer time frame was felt to be more realistic in terms of allowing for changes in events and the development of trends to occur with some certainty. In terms of engaging the university community in thinking realistically about the future in an organized manner, the exercise had achieved its purpose and much more. It led the way for the University leadership to flash out the needs and expectations of a University community for the future namely the struggle to achieve autonomy, an accountability structure and the willingness to be audited on all aspects of the university. Such preferences and desirable expectations of many in the university have later been translated into a tangible form in the project involving the University designating a piece of real–estate near the present campus, as a Science Park. But this is not going to be just an ordinary science park. Rather it is going to be an attempt by the University to stake a claim on an 'intellectual space' as it were to house the innovation and the creativity for a future that can be sustained for the university and the community. Appropriately named SAINS@USM it stands as a testimony of the University's quest for excellence in all aspects of University life from the present to the future. The university will determine how it will design and utilize this innovative space.

The final exercise took a departure from the methods used in the first three. Mapping was used extensively throughout but it differed from the method applied in the Inayatullah's model of MADCT. Instead the mapping was facilitated by a computer programming that was developed by the IFTF for this kind of work on futures

thinking. It follows from a four-step process: map the geography, structure the map, cluster the ideas and select the most important idea. Compared to the Inayatullah method, this one emphasized the leading role of the facilitator as both prompter and the integrator of the whole discussion.

From the viewpoint of the audience's full participation, the first two exercises had much to go on while the participation level in the other two exercises had their swings from high to low and then high again depending on the creativity and stamina of the facilitator. As far as scenario development was concerned, only the second and third exercises had them. The IFTF exercise tried to get at what the participants found important and of a high priority to them in the issues they have identified. Thus having a proper method to run such futures thinking exercises had indeed been rewarding. From the scenarios one can easily derive the wants and desires of participants. Scenarios tell a story about what is preferred and desirable over a fixed period of time. The nature and content of the narration will be discussed in the next section. The needs and expectation determinants were very clearly stated by the facilitator and assisted therefore in getting a full participation at some point.

4. Alternative Futures Methods and Multiplicity of Knowing: A Model of Analysis

Futures thinking allow us to have different notions of knowing. It focuses our attention on what we want for the immediate future as well as the distant future. Ross-Larson(1978) described this as the phenomenal present of trends and issues and the hypothetical future of alternative scenarios (Ross-Larson, 1978, p.vii). Knowing what Malaysians really want can be grouped under the three following aspects as identified by Dator (1978): probable, possible and preferable (Dator, 1978; Ross-Larson, 1978; p. 156). This corresponds to what he later termed as the five images that an individual can have of the future namely, traditional, developmental, ecological, transformational and the mystical (not bothered by things that seem part of the real world, for these are not the real world at all) (Dator, 1978, pp. 153-155). These are more concrete than the earlier "probable, possible and preferable" and these all convey a sense of the needs of the individuals or clear expressions of their preferences or expectations. For Dator, an individual can be expected to have more than one images of the future world at any one time and that the images may clash whenever the future is discussed. Thus for example, an individual might have traditional views about family life, developmental views about economic life and transformational views about political life. Dator believes this may make it difficult to sketch out the image of the future as Malaysians may have different needs or wants at any particular time as for instance, Malaysians may want to hold on to Islamic traditions and yet at the same time achieve a very advanced economic and technological structure (Dator, 1978, pp. 156-157).

All the four exercises above have elements of need determinants or what Malaysians want or desire for the future although in varying intensity. Exercise 1 indicates that needs could fall into two categories: needs that are common to all Malaysians such as basic rights and societal needs that can be further categorised into three levels: essential, desirable and luxurious. In order to pin-point the actual desires

or wants of Malaysians we therefore require a model to conceptualise these varying needs. The mapping that is carried out in the other three exercises has been able to meet this requirement to a certain extent. However the various trends and development as well as the different needs and expectations must be translated into meaningful alternative futures or scenarios for the future.

In the 1975 exercise mentioned above, it provided a detailed examination of what Malaysians 'prefer and desire' in the so-called future. But these are merely one-dimensional presentations of the future that are desired by the year 2001 (Ross-Larson, 1978, pp. 3-138). In the other exercises the needs determinants of preferability and desirability have been derived from the trends and emerging issues analyses which are an improvement from the former exercise. Through the use of back-casting these trends and expectations have been tested for their veracity (Inayatullah, 1995; Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2007, pp. 37-75). A more effective method involving the mapping of preferences and expectations has been developed. This actually captures the trends and developments as well as the expectations and values obtaining at a point in time and in a particular situation. While the former will convey a sense of our preferability to a certain thing (our preference for a certain trend or development), the latter represents our desirability for a certain thing occurring based on our values and expectations. In order to determine what Malaysians really want for the future with some preciseness, our preferences and desires for certain things, which are generally a summation of the needs determinants of Malaysians, can be illustrated as follows. The horizontal axis can represent the range of what we desire (moving from left to right), from least desirable to most desirable. The vertical axis can illustrate the swing in our preferences towards a certain thing (moving from top to down), from most preferable to least preferable. The line running diagonally across the figure indicates the gradual movement up the scale of preferences and desires, i.e., from least to most.

The applicability of the model in Figure 1 will become clearer in the discussion that follows.
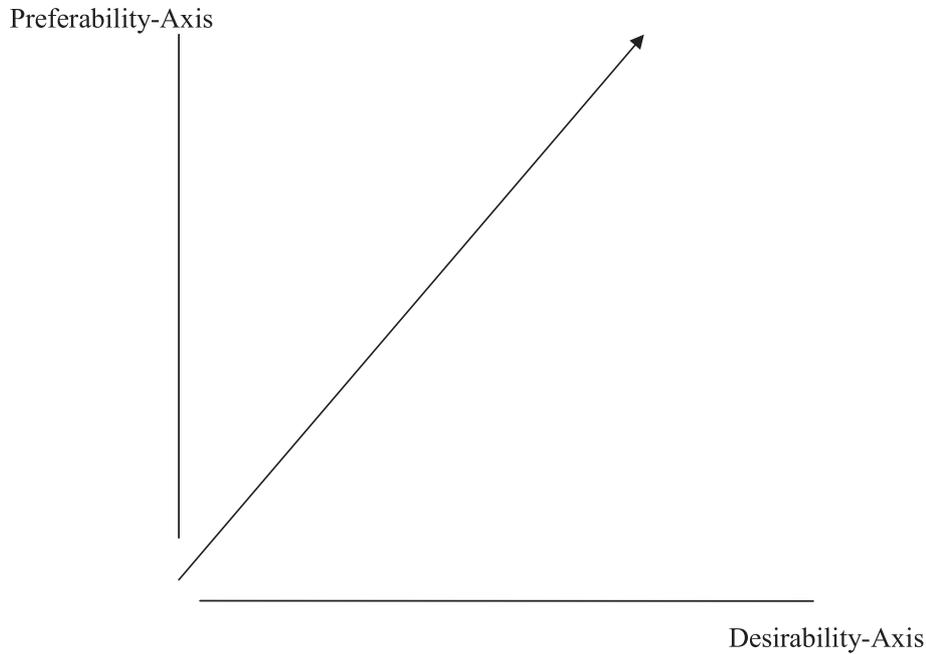
Preferability-Axis

Desirability-Axis

Figure 1. Alternative futures model: Showing Preferability Axis, Desirability Axis and Median Line

5. 2057 – The Centennial of Malaysian Independence: Contending Needs and Challenges

Fifty years from now Malaysia will celebrate its Centennial of Independence. This is going to be a great year to look back at what had happened. But before the process of back-casting can be carried out we need to flash out some of the interesting and significant events, developments, issues and trends that have happened in the intervening years from 2007 -2057.

Based on the results of the last General Elections on 8 March 2008, we could say that Malaysians have decided and that they seemed to convey that the following have comprised their shopping-list. To the futurist these are indeed examples of emerging trends that will impact on the years to come. In sum these include such societal needs as a more democratic model of governance, a reengaged monarchy, an assertive media, a more equitable wealth distribution formula and a high profile global outlook and the basic needs of the economy, education and the environment. In regard to the latter, it is common knowledge now that part of the reasons for the close majority obtained by the ruling Barisan Nasional Government could be attributed to the sharp increases in the prices for essential daily needs of the people, the real and not-so-real factor of educational opportunities for all and the double standards observed in the management of environmental issues especially natural resources development. But in the next 50 years the drivers of change and without doubt the main challenges for the

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country, will still be externally-based comprising the following factors: the growing force of Islam, an aggressive foreign workforce, the special relationship with China and the tripartite economic-relationship between Bangkok, Brunei and Singapore with implications yet unknown, for the Malaysian economy. With the external factors there is very little that Malaysia can do to affect its course other than engaging in some fanciful diplomatic footwork and the credits of its high global outlook and profile.. However in the case of the former, where the imperatives are more internal and therefore domestic-based, it is difficult to fathom what the extent of the expectations and wants of the people are going to be.

As indicated earlier the whole communal make-up of the society which is filled with contradictions and tensions will render any generalizations of emerging trends or events as meaningless and therefore making our work of creating alternative futures scenarios all that more awesome and daunting. We will require a separate determination of needs for each of the different races and ethnic groups in the country to begin with, which is an absolute impossibility, given the different problems faced by the respective racial groups including the foreign workforce employed in Malaysia. In the face of all these we may need firstly, to make certain assumptions on the issues enumerated above and secondly, move from there to consider prioritisng the list of trends and expectations that are still expected to affect the course of the future.

What follows is an attempt to map the trends and expectations of Malaysians in the years to come. In futures thinking terminology these are referred to as emerging issues analysis and second-order trend analysis (Universiti sains Malaysia, 2009, pp. 25-27). The latter is necessary in order to anticipate the 'consequences of the consequences' of a certain trend or expectation. To test the validity of the assumptions made, from time to time, the futurist will introduce contextual items that are meant to disturb the continuities in the flow or development of trends and expectations (Miller, 2003). Armed with this information we can then begin to create alternative futures scenarios for the country. The material can also be presented in a table form below following the preferabilty-desirability axes stated above.

Table 1.
Trends and expectation analysis

TRENDS	EXPECTATIONS
Most Preferable	*Most Desirable*
Economic cake is enlarged	Equal opportunities for all
Educational opportunities are opened to all	One-track system emplaced
Ecological balance is sustained	Improved coordination regionally
Second-order consequences	*Second-order consequences*
World economy is stabilized	Strong and popular Government in power
Malaysia's global profile is enhanced	United Malaysia is realized
Global focus is maintained	Malaysia's continued regional leadership

What is clear from the above is that in creating futures scenarios for the country we may need to make several assumptions on the basis of the trends and expectations presented. Questions we need to ask ourselves include the following that cover the areas of the economy, education and ecology. All these areas have been identified and discussed in the four exercises we had noted above:

1. What is the probability Malaysia will become a leader regionally at least, in the economy, education and the ecology fields?
2. What kind of special relationship can Malaysia form with China in the three areas of economics, education and the ecology?
3. What are the discontinuities that can be expected from the 9 challenges of the Wawasan (Vision) 2020?

For 1, the choice is between high or low. In the case of 2, it has to be decided on the basis of preferability, high, medium or low. For 3, the response will have to be either to regard the challenges as positive or negative. If it were the former, it is expected that we can achieve all the nine challenges by the year 2020 0r beyond. However if it were the latter, then the target will be falling short, either 5 out of 9 or 6 out of 9.

6. Creating Alternative Futures Scenarios for Malaysia 2057

Before moving on to create alternative futures scenarios for the year 2057, there is still one thing required for us to do, contextualising. The term refers to the introduction of an element that conveys a sense of probability or desirability into the narrative in order to construct strategic scenarios for the future. Contextualising is needed whenever we want to create scenarios from several trends and expectations. In the literature such scenarios are called complex scenarios as opposed to the simple that merely seeks to convey value-preferences or trends (Miller, 2003).

The context that we mean in this instance concern the role of China in enhancing or disturbing the future role of Malaysia as a regional leader in the economics, educational and ecological areas. From this we can present a matrix of possible futures scenarios as follows:

Table 2.
Possible futures scenarios for Malaysia in 2057 (FS = futures scenarios)

MALAYSIA Desirability >>>>	Regional Economic leadership		Regional Educational leadership		Regional Ecological leadership	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Preferability v	-		-		-	
v						
v						
China-relationship	-		-		-	
High	FS 1	FS 2	FS 3	FS 4	FS 5	FS 6
Medium	FS 7	FS 8	FS 9	FS 10	FS 11	FS 12
Low	FS 13	FS 14	FS 15	FS 16	FS 17	FS 18

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From the above table a total of 18 futures scenarios can be derived for Malaysia in the year 2057. They encompass the aspects of preferability of Malaysia going for a closer working relationship with China and the desirability for Malaysia continuing on as a regional leader in the fields of economy, education and ecology. All the different scenarios, 18 in all, can be derived from Table 1.2 and can also be plotted above or below the median line in Figure 1.1 above. Of the 18, we can further classify the scenarios into what are probable, possible and preferable. Of the preferred futures scenarios we can classify them further under the three main areas identified.

Table 3.
Classification of futures scenarios (Numbers refer to futures scenarios)

TYPES OF FUTURES SCENARIOS	CLASSIFICATION BY TYPES	
Probable	2, 4, 6, 8, 10. 12	
Possible	7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	
Preferable	7, 14	Economics
	9, 16	Education
	11, 18	Ecology

7. Conclusion

The above discussion has enabled us to crystallise 18 images of the future for Malaysia in the year 2057, fifty years from now. What it points to is that Malaysians are hoping that the country will remain a leader in the economic, educational and ecological activities of the region and for this it needs to realise itself a partnership with a rising China.

As an attempt at detailing what Malaysian really want for the future, the paper has the following conclusion to offer.

It is always difficult to know with all certainty what we really want. Our needs and expectations are forever in a state of flux and we battle our minds and our hearts to tell us what are the priority things for us today, tomorrow and the future.

Part of the problem is that we are never too sure of our values. Consequently we are pressed for choices that we can never make at any one time. We then react by passing blame on to the system and the environment. The other half of the problem is when we think we have made a choice but actually we are merely making a shopping-list of our wants at a particular time. We are trying to make up our minds and it is not easy to do so in the midst of all the other distractions in our life.

If the last General Elections results (12th GE, Mar.8) in Malaysia were any help we can try to make out what Malaysians really want. In sum their desires include the following: the present system of National Coalition Government (Barisan Nasional), BN, is due for change, the new media must be given more space for growth, the size of the economic cake cannot be further enlarged unless it moves in tandem with the world economy, and educational opportunities need to be more widely opened up to Malaysians and not only to the foreigners.

But the underlying trends that have been brought up by the 12th GE are more interesting and these include the following: the new assertiveness of the Monarchy, the

call for change within all the component parties of the BN, the beginning of the "rattling" in Sarawak and Sabah owing to their new-found power and hence their eagerness to exercise them and finally the psychologically-disturbing reversal of roles for the "once-opposition" and the "hitherto ruling" parties.

Ultimately all these will impact on Malaysian society and polity. The message that has been sent to the wide world out there is that Malaysians really do not know what they really want. The 12th General Election results are not indicative of the general needs and expectations of Malaysia either now or for the future. After fifty years we are only now seeing a glimpse of the spectrum of Malaysian needs and even then they are not publicly articulated. More is required of whomever and of whichever Government that holds power in the country. For the moment at least the picture created has been one where Malaysians are really only staying in the world of the periphery, the shadows of their real self and living in half-hopes and half-dreams.

Examples are many as for instance, let us look at economics: What is new in the New Economic Policy? What actually is growing in the Growth Triangles? Why must the Outline Perspective Plan (OPP) remain as an outline and in whose perspective? And in terms of the Economic Corridors, why should not development take place in the real zones instead of the corridors? In short all these smack of action only to be seen in the outer areas of reality but never the reality itself. Has Malaysians lost the ability to distinguish the real from the unreal?

The next fifty years are going to be a trying time for all Malaysians.

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